

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota
 July 21, 2013

Luke 10:38-42
 Colossians 1:15-28
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, I want to talk with you about Jesus today.

- **Hey! I'm glad to be in worship today!**

Oh, thank you very much. God is glad that you are here too.

Well, Kids, today I'd like to talk with you about how much Jesus loves you.

- **Hey! Isn't it nice to have the Teen Challenge Choir here today?**

Oh, yes it is. God will surely bless us and them during our time together.

Well, Kids, today I'd like to tell you about how God forgives us when we get into trouble or have problems in our lives.

- **Hey! Everyone is invited to have coffee and treats after church.**

Oh, yes. I hope that everyone can stay and visit and meet our guests.

Well, Kids. - **Hey!**

Oh no! Not another distraction! Do you kids see what is happening? Every time I start trying to visit with you about Jesus, somebody interrupts and I don't get to finish. I asked these friends to do this. I wanted us all to see how easy it is to miss out on what Jesus has to tell us. There are so many things, many of them very good things, which can distract us away from being with Jesus, listening to Jesus, experiencing Jesus' love for us.

We have a **special time to worship** God together, right now. Many things try to get us to miss out on this time together with God and with our faith family. We have many **opportunities to pray**, to talk with God – meal times, bedtime – but sometimes we are too much in a hurry or too tired to pray. We have many times to **study God's Word** together – Sunday school, Day Camp, Vacation Bible School – but sometimes we don't get involved because we are too busy to take time for God.

Kids, nobody **loves, cares for us** and **helps us** as much as God. We are **so lucky** that God has time for us. The **best thing** we can do is to **make time to listen** to God. Listen. **God loves to visit with us**. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

“I saw the sun rise today.” Ozzie told me that as we visited over his kitchen table. **“So, you were up early this morning eh?”** **“No,”** he said, **“I really saw the sun rise.”** Ozzie had only just recently returned to his little place on the lake following his fifth time in treatment for alcohol and drug dependency.

Ozzie's girlfriend, daughter and I had confronted him about his dependency and made it clear that if he didn't get help for his problem, we would all abandon him. We would have nothing more to do with him if he continued to pour his life down the tubes. He had lost everyone else in his family and friendship circle over the years. Now he was at risk of losing this last handful of people who cared about him. Ozzie was killing himself and we couldn't let it go on...

Ozzie was a great guy with a life-draining problem. He was a wonderful artist and a wonderful carpenter. He did amazing work, but he never managed to finish a project. He would go on binges and then everything good in his life would fall by the wayside. I had convinced him to help the little kids at Vacation Bible School to make some beautiful wooden projects. But I was never sure if he'd show up each day...

Ozzie had fallen off of a freight dock while unloading a truck. The fall had resulted in multiple back surgeries and an eventual dependence upon pain killers and then alcohol. He agreed to one more time go in for treatment. I visited him one day at the treatment center in St. Cloud. As I sat with him, a staff member brought a piece of mail. It turned out to be a card from a woman in our congregation there at Our Savior's Lutheran in Outing. Ozzie read aloud to me, **“We are all praying for you Ozzie.”** It was signed, **Jeanne and Your friends at Our Savior's.** When he was done reading that simple message, he looked up at me and I saw the tear in his eye.

Ozzie made it that time. He lived in peace and sobriety for the rest of his life. The day I visited his home and he told me that he'd seen the sunrise, he was trying to let me know that his life was different. He had been missing some of the deepest and richest parts of life. Now he was clear and delighted to be re-engaged in God's amazing world – despite his back pain... That's the day that Ozzie gave me this little **“Twenty-Four Hours a**

Day” book. He inscribed, **“To a Special Person who has helped me in Many Ways; God Bless You Pastor Darrell. Ozzie.”**

That was Ozzie. Then there’s Martha. Martha was **stressed**. Martha was **resentful**. She was **angry**. She was **overdoing** what people expected of her. She was **distracted** and that made her behave rudely to her guest – Jesus. Martha was **worried** about throwing this little lunch for Jesus and that captured all of her attention. How does worrying help anything? Has worrying ever done anything good in your life? Martha had invited Jesus to have lunch at her home and then got so busy that she almost forgot that he was there. Except, that is, to complain about her sister Mary not helping her with the food preparations.

Do you ever get stressed, resentful, angry? Do you ever put more on yourself than other people even expect of you? Are you ever distracted by little things that won’t matter in a year anyway? Do you worry about stuff?

While Martha did her extravagant lunch preparations, sister Mary sat and listened to what Jesus was saying. Jesus answered Martha’s complaint like this. **“Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”** Jesus said,

- We have need of only one thing...
- Mary chose the better part...
- That one thing will not be taken away from her...

We have **need of only one thing** – Paul writes about that in our lesson from **Colossians**. He uses **“all things”** four times in a couple of verses. All things come from God and belong to God. **Jesus takes first place** in everything. Is that how it is in your life? And **everything that God Almighty has to offer** to humanity comes to us in Jesus. **God delights** when Jesus brings us close to our life-giving God. Jesus comes to **prepare us for an eternity** spent in the loving embrace of God. Paul says that Christ comes to reveal **“God’s mystery”** to us. What is that mystery? The mystery is **“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”** While you and I race around, stressed, resentful, angry – Jesus dwells within us and longs to set us free to live in God’s peace. While you and I try to be our own god and try to run the world, Jesus says, **“Sit here and listen to me for awhile.”** While you and I try to handle all of our problems by ourselves, Jesus says,

“Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

It doesn't matter if it's chemical dependency, job concerns, family concerns or life concerns – we will never know peace, rest, hope or joy until we let go and let God be God in our lives. When Jesus is number one in our thoughts, hopes and dreams, we will know and live in true, God-given life. Mary focused on Jesus' word of promise – the one thing needed, the better part, that will never be taken away from us. The Apostle Paul, in Romans 8, tells us that there is nothing in the world, nothing that can separate us from the love of God which is ours in Jesus Christ. When we are living in the love of God, everything else falls into its proper place. That doesn't mean we won't have trouble. It means that nothing will be too big for us with God's help to handle.

I visited the **Crosby Mining Interpretive Center** a couple of weeks ago. The long time mine tour guide told about a family that had had a reunion there. The grandfather of this family had once been working in the **Milford Underground Mine** there. You remember that it was the Milford Mine that was flooded when a swamp and small lake broke through. Forty some miners died in that disaster. This man had just two weeks before decided that he shouldn't be working in the underground mine. He took a surface mining job instead; less pay but safer he thought. The day of this family reunion, the tour guide overheard an older woman telling her family. **“If my father hadn't made the decision to do something else with his life, I would have been Mom and Dad's only child. I wouldn't have had brothers and sisters and then there wouldn't have been all of you grandkids, nieces and nephews here today.”** One man made a decision that saved his own life and gave life to a whole bunch of other folks. Do you have any important decisions to make in your life? Any changes in direction needed? Any lives to save? And good, life-giving dreams to pursue?

That little **Twenty-Four Hours a Day** book that **Ozzie** gave me so many years ago, it reads like this for today's date.

“Faith can move mountains.” That expression means that faith can change any situation in the field of personal relationships. If you trust Him, God shows you the way to **“move mountains.”** If you are humble enough to know that you can do little by yourself to change a situation, if you have enough faith to ask God to give you the power

you need, and if you are grateful enough for the grace He gives you, you can "**move mountains.**" Situations will be changed for the better by your presence." (Twenty-Four Hours a Day, Hazelden, Center City, MN. 55012, 1975, July 21st reading.)

Do you believe that?

One thing is needful – Jesus. Thanks be to God. Amen.